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Growing With Books

Children's Literature

in the Formative Years and Beyond

Resource

Guide

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The Five Books



The Five Books

Book 1 Literature and Education

Prologue: What Stories Have to Do With Life *Lissa Paul*

Stories Are for Understanding *Gordon Wells*

Myth, Legend, and Fairy Tale: "Serious Statements About Our Existence" *Joban Lyall Aitken*

Epilogue: Life and Literature in the Classroom *Lissa Paul*

Bibliography

Book 2 Who Is Children's Literature For?

Prologue: Children's Literature Is Not Just for Children – It's for Grown-ups, Too *Lissa Paul*

Our Own Words and the Words of Others, Part 1 *David Booth and Jo Phenix*

Cross-Age Tutoring in Writing *Beverley Allinson*

Six Magic Words *Brenda Protheroe*

Epilogue: Share, Listen, Mediate *Lissa Paul*

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Book 3 About Poetry

Prologue: What About Poetry? *Lissa Paul*

Inside Poetry *Lissa Paul*

Poem As Car *Diane Dawber*

Epilogue: Poetry As Something You Want to Do, Not Something You
Have to Do *Lissa Paul*

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Book 4 Reading, Talking, and Writing

Prologue: How Story Readers Become Story Makers *Lissa Paul*

Reading to Children *Joan McGrath*

Storybook Reading and Literacy: Children's Responses to Stories
Paul Shaw

"Would You Rather . . .": Looking at Drama and Story *David Booth*

Epilogue: The Reader in the Story *Lissa Paul*

Bibliography

Book 5 Books to Grow With

Prologue: Finding Books and Deciding What to Read *Lissa Paul*

Finding the Right Book at the Right Time *Judy Sarick*

Teaching Beginning Reading With Children's Books *Barbara Park*


Canadian Novels in the Junior Classroom *Joan McGrath*

Canadian Magazines in the Classroom *Kathy Lowinger*

Our Own Words and the Words of Others, Part 2 *David Booth and
Larry Swartz*

Epilogue: For the Love of Language *Lissa Paul*

Bibliography



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General Preface



General Preface

For generations parents and teachers have enjoyed reading aloud to children and have witnessed the wonderful power of “story”, or narrative forms of literature, to engage and entrance – and inform and transform – the imaginations of their children. Extensive studies in early literacy development have confirmed such observations of the influence of story and have extended our understanding of the crucial role the use of literature plays in providing meaningful models and demonstrations of reading, writing, and thinking.

Yet experience with literature, and specifically the concept of story, provides more for the young learner than imaginative pleasure. In a recent project funded by the Ministry of Education,¹ Edgar Wright and Rosemary Young found that background experience with story significantly contributed to academic achievement. When children have had the benefit of rich experiences with good literature, they come to all reading and writing encounters in school with an enhanced background knowledge of language. It is not surprising that increasing numbers of teachers are now exploring new ways of making literature a central part of their language arts program.

As a resource document, *Growing With Books* confirms the basic tenets about learners and learning set out in the Ministry of Education's policy document *The Formative Years*.² *Growing With Books* reflects a changing understanding and renewed appreciation of language, learning, and literacy development, based on the following premises:

- Shared and interactive experiences with literature encourage the development of active and participating skilled readers and writers.
- A wide range of opportunities to respond to literature through reading, writing, speaking, and drama fosters proficiency in communication and thinking.

1. E.N. Wright and R.E. Young, *Arts in Education. The Use of Drama and Narrative: A Study of Outcomes* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1986).

2. Ministry of Education, Ontario, *The Formative Years: Provincial Curriculum Policy for the Primary and Junior Divisions of the Public and Separate Schools of Ontario* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1975).

- All phases of the teaching-learning process promote effective listening, sharing, and mediation through interaction and collaboration.
- Evaluation of progress is ongoing and formative, and is an integral part of all phases of the learning process.

Growing With Books is a practical collection of “books” or stories written by some of Ontario’s most respected practising experts (teachers, librarians, storytellers, poets, consultants, administrators, and researchers). Each contribution in the collection speaks with a unique voice: ideas and theories are woven together with practical suggestions that teachers can use in their classrooms. While each author presents a personal point of view on a particular aspect, all authors express the same message: to grow as a literate, thinking person, one needs to grow with books.

Growing With Books is not intended to be a prescriptive teacher’s manual as much as an invitation to the novice and experienced educator alike to read and actively explore a variety of strategies for the use of high-quality literature throughout the Primary and Junior Divisions, and beyond. Suggested titles in the reference lists and bibliographies have been chosen because they have a timeless appeal and because they respond to a broad range of interests and needs. Instructional decisions involving the suitability of an individual piece of literature should be approached with sensitivity. As always, teachers will continue to select literature on the basis of its literary merit and its thematic appeal. Should any controversial issues emerge, informed teachers will always seek to engage children in positive, thought-provoking discussions of such issues within their cultural and historical context.

Growing With Books is a document that will be enjoyed, sampled, explored, and used in daily practice. It will provide a resource for ongoing school-based dialogue between principals and their staff and for communication with parents, trustees, and other interested members of the community.

Growing With Books is dedicated to those who love language. It is for all those who believe that literature and story are central to a growing awareness of what it means to be literate in our culture.

General Prologue:

The Beginning



General Prologue: The Beginning

Lissa Paul

What do you do when a child looks up at you and says, “This is the best book I ever read. Do you have any more like it?” How do you know what it is about the story that has touched that child so deeply? Is the child looking for a story about redemption? Outwitting grown-ups? Animals? Magic? Happy families? Monsters? Adventures? Is the child looking for a fantastic or foreign landscape? Or a familiar one? For a story with exquisite and strange language? Or one with the dialect and characters of a home left behind? The range of possibilities is bewildering – as you probably know all too well.

Growing With Books suggests ways for you, as reader and teacher, to respond to the needs of the child’s simple, direct question; to talk about stories in a language that brings you, the child, and the book closer together; to share with the children in your class a love of stories and poems; to help them learn to write as well as read – to become authors themselves; and to encourage them to explore a spectrum of responses to stories, rather than look for a single “right” answer.

This is a story about stories – not as something to be confined to the classroom but as they live and grow in our minds, as we live and grow in the world. It is only in childhood, as Graham Greene says in “The Lost Childhood”, that stories “have any deep influence on our lives”.¹ Like Greene, the authors of *Growing With Books* know that children’s literature is important because what we read as children becomes part of the landscape of our grown-up minds.

The contributors to this collection write from a social context that is constantly changing our images of children and childhood. They know that it is no longer possible to shelter children from the vagaries of life. On any weekend, children and their parents can be found wearing the same kinds of jeans, T-shirts, and running shoes, watching the same programs on television, and pursuing the same trivial board games. Children

1. G. Greene, “The Lost Childhood”, in *Collected Essays* (Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 13.

cannot be seen as innocent any more, either. They know (or claim to) many adult secrets they would have been sheltered from as little as a generation ago. Today, even very young children have access to the six o'clock news as well as "Mr. Dressup", and to the daytime soaps as well as "Passe Partout".

In sharing language, styles of dress, and games with their elders, contemporary children are a lot like their medieval counterparts. Instead of seeing children and grown-ups as distinct from each other (as society has for about four hundred years) we now think of children as people who grow up. Children experience the world in relation to the one that grown-ups inhabit; and grown-ups know that their adult lives are formed by how they experienced the world as children. Child and adult are interdependent. There is no sudden, complete metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly.

The authors of *Growing With Books* speak eloquently about the help stories can provide to both children and adults in charting a course through a mass of shifting sensibilities and the ways in which children and adults can explore stories together. Reading is not simply the act of decoding letters on a page or an exercise in comprehension; "it involves searching for patterns of meaning, problem-solving, analysis, judgement, evaluation, and synthesis."²

Growing With Books is not an instruction manual. Readers find meanings in stories more readily in conversations with each other than through listening to lectures. The articles presented here offer practical, effective ways of sharing books of poetry, prose, and drama, the literature of oral tradition, and books of information. The authors have *listened* to the children with whom they work and they know how to interpret the children's responses. As you read about their approaches, be aware that a writer's attitude may be more important than his or her methodology. Listen to the multiplicity of voices and choose the ones that resonate for you.

2. Ministry of Education, Ontario, *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1975), p. 42.

Share. Stories are for sharing. The image of the tall teacher handing down the right answers to tidy rows of little children seated at their desks is fading from the classroom.

Answers often kill interpretation. Questions are much more useful and interesting, though humans generally prefer “enigmas to muddles” as the critic Frank Kermode says in a book about secrets.³ Questions seem to promise the existence of answers, of truths – if only we could figure out how to find them. Alice in Wonderland says something similar when she thinks she can answer the Mad Hatter’s riddle about why a raven is like a writing desk. Alice is pleased when the tea-party conversation turns to something sensible – like riddles. At last, she believes, she will be able to “find out the answer”. Riddles are supposed to have answers, so she assumes she can work out the right one. But the Mad Hatter subverts her belief: he hasn’t “the slightest idea” what the answer is.

Stories are worth exploring even if there are no absolutely right interpretations of them. Child and adult ought to explore stories together, the adult approaching the story in the same spirit of discovery as the child.

If a story doesn’t leave us with something to think about – something to puzzle over, something unsolved or unresolved – it is a good bet that the story is not a work of literature. It may be something to read – so are cereal boxes, weather reports, and hockey scores – but it is not a work of imaginative literature. As a teacher you don’t have to be able to explain what a story is about. A story, unlike a cereal box, is more than the sum of its words.

The principle behind sharing is to help the naïve reader find clues to the ways stories work, to develop techniques of reading, and to explore a variety of answers, not just the “right” ones.

3. F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 49.

Listen. Children have open, unconditioned responses to what they read. Listen to those responses.

The way children solve computer problems shows this. They experiment with a variety of solutions and put their imaginations to work exploring options and testing out a range of possible solutions – unlike adults who are not likely to try unfamiliar computer problems in the first place (at least not until they have been told the “right” way to do them). Unconditioned responses often turn out to be the more original, interesting, and insightful ones, and children bring that freshness to stories, as well as to computer problems.

Mediate. As well as listening and sharing, the teacher mediates between the child and the book. That means helping children develop language and familiarity with the narrative conventions (genre, structure, style, narrative voice) that make stories. It also means helping them read the language of pictures. This is especially important for new readers because picture books are usually the first stories they encounter.

In your role as mediator, focus on the points in the story that arouse your interest and your curiosity; the emotions, thoughts, wishes, dreams, beliefs, and values that you want to share. Listen attentively to the kinds of clues that the children give about what interests them. We must trust the children to take from the story what is important to them. Adults don’t know all the answers; and children know we don’t know. That does not mean we abandon the search. It means that we look – together.

Note on Organization

The contributors to this resource guide care about children and about what children read: they are classroom teachers, academics, booksellers, poets, critics, and book promoters. Taken together the five books tell a story about stories; but each is also self-contained. The prologue and epilogue to each book analyse some of the issues raised and suggest ways to bring those ideas into the classroom.

Reference Lists

The lists of books at the end of articles are intended as quick reference guides; the selections reflect the books that were in the authors' minds at the time of writing. The authors have recommended books that contain a balance of social, literary, cultural, and historical content. But a story is more than the sum of its parts. The selection decisions were based on a host of considerations (all demanding precedence) from individual preferences, to feelings about how the books on the list related to each other, to the desire both to include comfortable favourites and to reveal something new.

General Epilogue:

“In My End Is My Beginning”



General Epilogue: “In My End Is My Beginning”

Lissa Paul

The first question is still to be asked: “What is a story?” The question looks simple enough. The Oxford English Dictionary says, among its definitions, that a story is “a recital of events that have or are alleged to have happened; a narrative designed for the entertainment of a hearer or reader”. But that definition says little. It doesn’t account for the persistence and vitality of stories.

Growing With Books is about the humanity of stories. It is about the power of imagination and the power of imaginative literature. It is not about turning Winnie the Pooh stories into honey projects. It is about acquiring a language that allows you to mediate between the child and the story; to draw attention to what is happening to whom and why; a language that holds the key to an ever-growing community of story.

Stories all fit together in a cosmic game of infinite proportions. The more stories readers possess, the more able they are to play the game. Stories are acquired one at a time, word upon word – words growing into stories. Ted Hughes explains, in very evocative terms, that words contain a whole “constellation, floating and shining” of “not just the crowded breadth of the world but all the depths and intensities of it too”.² As a single strand of DNA carries the code of a human being, as Blake sees the whole world in a grain of sand, so too a single word – Hughes chooses “crucifixion” – can bring “the inner brightness” of a whole cosmic story into consciousness. A single word lights up the breadth, depth, and intensity of the world.

In the end, says Hughes, words and stories live within us; they “remain part of the head that lives our life, and they grow as we grow. A story can wield so much! And a word wields the story.”³

1. T. S. Eliot, “East Coker”, in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 27.

2. T. Hughes, “Myth & Education”, in *Writers, Critics and Children*, edited by Geoff Fox, Graham Hammond, Terry Jones, Frederic Smith (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), p. 81.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Notes on Contributors



Notes on Contributors

Johan Lyall Aitken ("Myth, Legend, and Fairy Tale: 'Serious Statements About Our Existence' "). All we have are stories; educating the imagination of all children through the development of narrative consciousness is, for Johan Aitken, the hope of the world. She is a professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto, and at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Beverley Allinson ("Cross-Age Tutoring in Writing") works to bring books and children together, believing that good stories feed the imagination and the spirit. She writes with children, and for them, and is based in Toronto.

David Booth ("Our Own Words and the Words of Others", Parts 1 and 2, and "'Would You Rather . . .': Looking at Drama and Story") cares about books and children and helping teachers find ways of making those relationships stronger. He is a professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto.

Diane Dawber ("Poem As Car") believes that children are self-propelled towards discovery and that poetry can help them in their quest. She is a Kingston area poet and a teacher with the Lennox and Addington Board of Education.

Kathy Lowinger ("Canadian Magazines in the Classroom") believes that the books that feed children's imaginations ought to be the very best we can offer. She is director of the Canadian Children's Book Centre, Toronto.

Joan McGrath ("Canadian Novels in the Junior Classroom" and "Reading to Children") wants to put the best possible books into children's hands, classrooms, and homes. She is a library consultant for the Toronto Board of Education and a freelance book reviewer.

Barbara Park ("Teaching Beginning Reading With Children's Books") respects the thinking and language capabilities of children and believes it is our responsibility to nourish those capabilities with the richest possible resources. She is a professor at Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University.

Lissa Paul ("Inside Poetry" and the prologues and epilogues) envisions a time when all children can share in the pleasure and power of imaginative literature. She teaches children's literature at the University of New Brunswick.

Jo Phenix ("Our Own Words and the Words of Others", Part 1) believes in giving all children access to literature so that every reader, regardless of ability, is introduced to good stories. She was formerly an English consultant with the Peel Board of Education.

Brenda Protheroe ("Six Magic Words"), a member of the City of York Board of Education, wants to help students find and learn to value their own voices through telling their own stories and responding to those of others.

Judy Sarick ("Finding the Right Book at the Right Time") believes that reading is a most pleasurable form of entertainment. She is a children's librarian who now earns her living as a bookseller.

Paul Shaw ("Storybook Reading and Literacy: Children's Responses to Stories") believes that teachers are the key to children's attitudes to literature. He is principal of Floradale School, Mississauga.

Larry Swartz ("Our Own Words and the Words of Others", Part 2) enjoys exploring the connections between books, himself, and other readers. He is a language arts resource teacher with the Peel Board of Education and an instructor at the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto.

Gordon Wells ("Stories Are for Understanding") believes that there is a story in everything, and that all stories are worth telling. He is a professor in the Curriculum Department, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

